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Duxbury Clipper

The Clipper Visits... Holly Morris

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by MARTHA HIMES

For Holly Morris, conservation is a family affair.

Morris, the chair of Duxbury's Open Space and Recreation Committee, is the daughter of local conservationist Dr. Lansing Bennett, who chaired the Conservation Commission from 1969 to 1979. In Bennett's first year as chair, the Commission established the western, central and eastern greenbelt conservation plans. In the following years of his chairmanship, the Commission purchased over 1000 acres of conservation land, much of it falling within those Greenbelt areas.

Now, 30 years later, his daughter is writing plans for the land purchased under Bennett's tenure as Conservation Commission chair. Her Open Space and Recreation Committee will soon be releasing the 2002 *Open Space and Recreation*

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Plan, a critical planning tool in Duxbury's land acquisition efforts.

In order to qualify for Commonwealth of Massachusetts Self-Help grant money, Duxbury must have an *Open Space and Recreation Plan*, and must update the plan every five years. Plan updates are approved by and filed with the Commonwealth's Division of Conservation Services.

Much of the open space Duxbury has acquired has been purchased with Self-Help grants. According to a chart within the draft 2002 *Open Space and Recreation Plan*, approximately 1,105 acres - almost half - of Duxbury's conservation land purchases utilized Self-Help grant money.

Morris and her committee began writing the plan update in September, devoting 80-100 hours weekly to the project. Some communities hire consultants to write their plans, she says, but it costs about \$30,000.

A biologist, Morris graduated from Boston University in 1975 with a degree in marine sciences and parasitology. Her scientific background comes in handy on the Open Space and Recreation Committee, as much of Duxbury's conservation land falls within the aquifer protection overlay district. Aquifer protection has been one of the driving forces behind Duxbury's conservation efforts to date. Morris believes it will always be a critical issue, as she feels that water quality is directly proportional to land values. The North Hill marsh, in Duxbury's Central Greenbelt, she says, has some of the most productive wells in the area, and its aquifer stretches out

through much of the town.

In the five years between plan updates, Morris says the Open Space and Recreation Committee provides assistance to the Conservation Commission by performing stewardship work, such as clearing trails and reviewing trail guides.

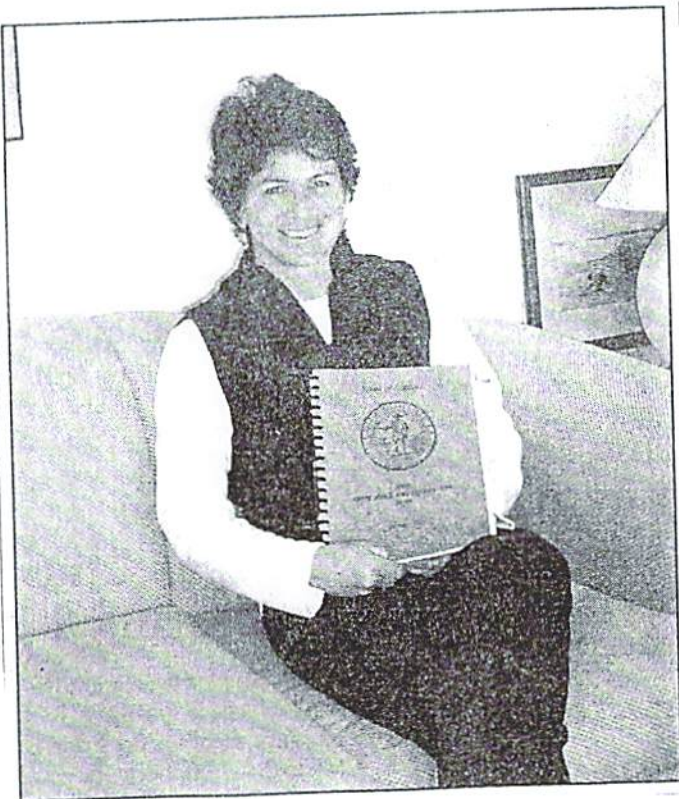
Between writing the 1997 and 2002 plans, the Committee, with the help of the Boy Scouts, worked on the Bay Circuit Trail. Once the 2002 plan is complete, the Committee plans to develop a forest management plan for the Town.

"A lot of the land, including the Town forest areas and conservation lands, was logged. People forget that...If you go into the Town Forest on Mayflower Street...it's really a beautiful setting, and people think that's the way it always has been. It's beautiful because it was logged. By thinning out the area, sunlight came in and allowed trees to grow large and bulky, whereas if you left it wild, you'd have spindly trees all over the place and it wouldn't look very nice," Morris said.

Morris grew up in Duxbury, moving here with her parents in 1955. She has lived here for most of her life, most recently on Abrams Hill, with her husband, Jim, and five-year-old daughter, Michaela.

Over the years, she has seen the town change, both for the good and the bad. One of the changes that bothers her the most, as a marine scientist, is the parking of cars on the beach. "Personally, I'm not a big fan of vehicles on the beach, especially the volume of vehicles. I would like to see that downsized," she said.

Morris is especially concerned about intertidal zones,





areas where there are tidal fluctuations. "I see too many trucks sitting in the intertidal zone, on the bay side. An intertidal zone supports a lot of marine life, such as bivalves, clams, sea worms, and arthropods. It's a very diverse ecosystem, and to have trucks sitting on top of it all the time, driving through it. If there's any kind of fuel or oils dripping into this area, it's contaminating, crushing, it's abusing."

"When she was growing up, the only cars allowed on the beach were a few beach buggies from a local beach buggy association. "It was a beautiful, open space. It is now a parking lot, and it's disgusting."

Morris hopes to raise a third generation of Duxbury conservationists. She frequently walks with Michaela in the woods and on the beach, in hopes that she, too, will learn

to appreciate nature.

In addition to their conservation work, Morris and her father share a connection through China, where Morris and her husband traveled to adopt Michaela, and where Bennett was stationed with the CIA in the 1980s. "My parents spent a lot of time in Beijing. They stayed in the American sector, near the embassy. I re-

ally felt like I was retracing my father's footsteps over there at times," Morris said. Bennett was the CIA's Chief of Medical Services for Southeast Asia from 1980 until 1993, when he was killed by a terrorist outside of CIA headquarters in McLean, VA. "I wish he had had a chance to meet Michaela. I think he would have been tickled by her."

Even during her travels in China, Morris had conservation on her mind. "Mainland China is so poor, and so heavily populated. People are just trying to eke out a life over there....It makes you think twice about where this country is headed. We're such great consumers, we're going to run into a similar problem if we don't open our minds and eyes."

Conservation land is, to Morris, a place of refuge. "After September 11, I spent a lot of time walking in the woods and walking the beach. And I was amazed by how many people were doing the same thing. They just had to be out in the open, to find some solace, to find some peace, to be reflective. And I think that's what open space does for a lot of people. It provides a sanctuary for them."